



## Honduras

### International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of 7.6 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), 7 percent is Amerindian, and the rest are of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent.

There are no reliable government statistics on religious affiliation. In a 2007 nationwide survey, CID-Gallup reported that 47 percent of respondents identify themselves as Roman Catholics, 36 percent as evangelical Protestants, and 17 percent either provide no answer or consider themselves "other." The principal religious groups are Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witness, Mennonite, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant groups. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission Churches. A growing number of evangelical churches have no denominational affiliation. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represents the evangelical leadership. There are small numbers of Muslims and Jews. San Pedro Sula has a mosque and a synagogue, and Tegucigalpa has a synagogue.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. The Catholic Church continued developing plans with the armed forces to provide religious chaplains to the military. The Government consults with the Catholic Church and occasionally appoints Catholic leaders to quasi-official commissions on key subjects of mutual concern, such as anticorruption initiatives. Prominent Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches were represented on more than a dozen governmental commissions, including the National Anticorruption Commission. During the reporting period, the Catholic cardinal and evangelical leaders supported congressional negotiations to end a hunger strike by state prosecutors alleging corruption at the Public Ministry.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. The Catholic Church is the only "church" recognized under the law. Other religious groups are accorded status as "religious associations" by receiving juridical personality, which provides tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty. The Constitution provides the executive branch power to grant juridical personality to associations, including religious organizations, while new "churches" can be recognized only by an act of the National Congress. Non-Catholic religious groups, including the Honduran Fraternity of Evangelical Churches, have petitioned Congress for recognition as "churches" but operated as religious associations while awaiting a decision.

Associations seeking juridical personality are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, by-laws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the Honduran Fraternity of Evangelical Churches for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications are also referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president signs the approved resolutions. There were no reports that the Ministry of Government and Justice rejected any such application during the period covered by this report.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The Ministry generally grants such permits.

Under Article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony, the Government prohibits immigration of foreign missionaries who practice religions claiming to use witchcraft or satanic rituals and allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud.

There are religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as parochial schools. They neither receive special treatment from the Government nor do they face any restrictions.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

The Constitution stipulates that only lay people may seek election to Congress.

The National Congress authorized the return to the Catholic Church of former properties of historic interest that the Government expropriated more than 100 years ago; however, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism challenged this motion.

The Catholic Church reported that on several occasions the recent health sector reforms of the Ministry of Health impeded the Church's efforts to build new hospitals, manage its existing hospitals, and operate its medical school.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, in April 2008 approximately one hundred people protested in front of the U.S. Embassy in opposition to the Pope's visit to the United States.

The Catholic Church designated the archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the archbishop established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section within his archdiocese. The leadership of the Catholic Church and the Honduran Fraternity of Evangelical Churches exerted significant influence over politics and society.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

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